George Eastman's Modern Stone-Age Family

Snapshot Photography and the Brownie

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Before the snapshot, photography was largely a gentleman's hobby, a pastime that required technical skill and costly equipment. George Eastman, founder of the Eastman Kodak Company, transformed the practice of photography—first in 1888 by replacing the complexities of wet-plate processing with a twenty-five-dollar handheld camera (preloaded with film for a hundred exposures and advertised with the slogan, "You press the button, we do the rest"), and then, in 1900, by democratizing the snapshot with the simple and affordable one-dollar "Brownie" camera. By 1905, an estimated ten million Americans had become amateur photographers, most of whom were previously excluded from photographic expression because of gender, age, or economic status.[1] That women and children were particularly targeted is evidenced in the decision to name the dollar camera after the Brownies, who were invisible sprites of Scottish folklore that writer and illustrator Palmer Cox (1840–1924) had commercialized through a series of illustrated poems and an unprecedented number of product endorsements that had appeared in popular women's and children's magazines from the 1880s onward.

Although hardly innovative in itself, Eastman's appropriation of Cox's Brownies takes on particular importance when considered in the larger context of an emerging generation of snapshot photographers. The aggressive marketing of the Brownie camera redefined not only who could take

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1. Graham King, *Say "Cheese"! The Snapshot as Art and Social History* (London, 1986), 9.

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photographs, but for what purpose. As I argue here, Eastman's conflation of the product with its commercialized mythic namesake was a campaign to portray snapshot photography as a phenomenon both modern and magic, one that fulfilled the primitive urge toward visual communication. Superficially, this may seem no more than a ploy to reach a broad, new consumer base. The Kodak trade circulars, advertising ephemera, and correspondence archived at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, and the materials related to Palmer Cox at the Strong Museum, also in Rochester, tell another story, however. At a deeper level, Eastman's exploitation of a figure steeped in folklore actually offered a magical alternative to textual narrative.[2]

This study focuses on the marketing of the Brownie camera from its introduction in 1900 to 1914 and the discontinuation of the "Brownie Book," also known as "The Book of the Brownies" (Brownie-specific advertising brochures aimed at children). It revisits the importance of the Brownie in Kodak history and explores the social impact of an emerging technology. The complex history of the Brownie combines the study of folklore, the history of advertising, and the history of snapshot photography. If Eastman's biographers and the historians of Kodak have often trivialized the toy-like box camera, they have followed a tradition that grants artistic merit to photography largely on the basis of technical skill.[3] Paul Sternberger's study of amateur photography and art demonstrates that contempt for the "press-the-button-we-do-the-rest-amateur" during the earliest years of snapshot photography extended beyond the professional community and into amateur photographic societies longing to establish

2. I would like to thank Kathy Connor, George Eastman House archivist, who facilitated my access to Eastman's correspondence and a collection of materials related to the Brownie camera, as well as Todd Gustavson, technology curator, who helped me with the collection of cameras, packaging, and select trade brochures. The Richard and Ronay Menschel Library at the Eastman House (with more than 43,000 volumes about photography and film) was also useful for its large collection of trade journals. The Strong Museum, also in Rochester, New York, has an excellent collection of advertising ephemera related to Palmer Cox's Brownies as well as first-edition copies of his series of Brownie books. I also thank David Hughes, secretary and magazine editor for the Kodak Brownie Collectors Group in England, for supplementing my materials with a copy of the 1902 "The Book of the Brownies," which is not available at the Eastman House.

3. Elizabeth Brayer devotes less than two pages (of 529) to the Brownie, making it a footnote to the development of Kodak in *George Eastman: A Biography* (Baltimore, 1996). Carl W. Ackerman's otherwise superior biography mentions the Brownie on only one page (*George Eastman* [Boston, 1930]). Douglas Collins devotes approximately one paragraph to that camera in *The Story of Kodak* (New York, 1990). In *The Snapshot Photograph: The Rise of Popular Photography* (London, 1977), Brian Coe and Paul Gates include a brief chapter on the Brownie. Outside of specialized collectors' groups, the most thorough treatment of the Brownie camera has been that of Nancy Martha West in *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville, Va., 2000), who nevertheless fails to mention "The Brownie's Story of the Brownie."

their legitimacy.[4] Further removing the Brownie from serious discussion, the Eastman Kodak Company warned in 1900 that "The Brownie is not a Kodak" and urged retailers to shun such brand-demeaning slogans as "A genuine Eastman Kodak for 99 cents."[5] Consequently, the camera that brought snapshot photography to the masses is usually credited as doing just that and nothing more. Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the meaning of the campaign that offered a new form of expression to millions of consumers. The Brownie tends to lose its historical specificity in works treating snapshot photography, and is often overshadowed by its more expensive predecessor, the Kodak Number 1 of 1888.[6] Moreover, despite its evocative name, the Brownie has received no attention from scholars of folklore, who must contend with a disciplinary bias against technology.[7] It is easy to imagine that a folkloric approach to Eastman's Brownie yields a cautionary tale of how "products of the imagination are in danger of becoming instrumentalized and commercialized."[8]

4. B. F. McManus, quoted in Paul Spencer Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete: The Legitimization of Photography as Art in America, 1880–1900* (Albuquerque, N.M., 2001), 112 and chap. 4.

5. Kodak trade circular, no. 4 (March 1900), 1 (all "trade circulars" were published in Rochester by the Eastman Kodak Company). The Brownie was meant to be an entry-level camera for children who would grow into life-long consumers of the more expensive Kodak line. The reality of consumer response is addressed later in this article.

6. Effectively bypassing the Brownie in her fascinating study, Marianne Hirsch references the 1888 Kodak and then concludes: "Thus photography quickly became the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation" (*Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* [Cambridge, Mass., 1997], 6). Mary Warner Marien's *Photography: A Cultural History* (New York, 2002), 169, includes a passing reference. Douglas R. Nickel's introductory essay to the catalog *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present* (San Francisco, 1998) contains a balanced, if brief, view of the culture generated by Eastman's Brownie and Kodak cameras (pp. 9–15). Geoffrey Batchen employs categories from material culture to study "vernacular photo objects" in *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 59. His work, as well as Patrick Maynard's *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking through Photography* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997), Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames*, and Julia Hirsch's *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect* (Oxford, 1981) exemplify the historical and philosophical scholarship on photography that does not deal specifically with the Brownie.

7. Folklorists continue to struggle with the terms "folklore" and "technology" as opposing binaries. Often romanticized as the antithesis of civilization, the purity of the "folk" mythos is jeopardized by technology. See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Folklore's Crisis," *Journal of American Folklore* (1998): 281–327, which points out the irony of using modern recording devices to preserve oral histories and tales while shunning those same devices as a legitimate part of a folk community. A pioneering attempt to contend with the romantic ideal of preindustrial peasant culture is Herman Bausinger's *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*, trans. Elke Dettmer (Bloomington, Ind., 1990). See also Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, Wisc., 1997).

8. Jack David Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington, Ky., 2002), 3. Zipes revolutionized the study of folklore and fairy tales by

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And yet, Eastman's "instrumentalization" of folklore begins with an already-exploited sprite, first commercialized nearly two decades earlier by Palmer Cox. Thus, in order to better reveal the significance of the Brownie camera, I will first explore the mutations of its eponymous folkloric figure. After demonstrating how Cox transformed the sprite from solitary recluse to advocate of technology and "spokescreature," I will look at what makes Eastman's use of the character unique, and how the connections between it, the product, and the consumer helped define snapshot photography. Finally, I will consider how the Brownie character declined and was gradually replaced with "Brownie" boys and girls.

Cox's Transformation

The original Brownie is a reclusive character, an invisible sprite of Scottish folktales. As a youth of Scotch-Irish descent, Cox is said to have "heard and absorbed the folklore of the Grampian Mountains of Scotland" at the firesides around his country home of Granby, Quebec.[9] The typical Brownie of those tales would have been both a mischievous and helpful domestic creature, an unseen resident attached to a particular house. Properly rewarded with a well-placed bowl of cream or a bit of cake, the capricious servant was said to perform useful tasks while its adoptive human family slept. When offended, however, the Brownie could become a source of annoyance, plaguing the household with tricks.[10] When Cox adapted the tales of his childhood for publication in American children's magazines and a series of illustrated books, the creatures were no longer solitary nor attached to a particular domestic space; they had become a self-governing, independent, and venturesome band (fig. 1).[11] As noted by Roger Cummings, who is the author of the only book-length study of Cox's Brownies: "The Brownie band is thoroughly democratic. Except in Palmer Cox's *Brownies* (the play), *The Brownies and Prince Florimel*, and *The Brownie Clown of Brownietown*, none of the group is singled out as a permanent commander, leader, or guide."[12] Moreover, the group became increasingly cosmopolitan as Cox introduced characters of various nationalities and occupations, the most popular of

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examining their social function with the tools of modern literary theory. He is one of the relatively few folklorists to address the relation between technology and the folk—usually in a manner that emphasizes the negative impact of technology.

9. Roger W. Cummings, *Humorous but Wholesome: A History of Palmer Cox and the Brownies* (Watkins Glen, N.Y., 1973), 16.

10. Marc Alexander, *A Companion to the Folklore, Myths, and Customs of Britain* (Stroud, U.K., 2002), 36. See also Alison Jones, *Larousse Dictionary of World Folklore* (Edinburgh, 1995), 82.

11. Cox began publishing illustrated poems about the Brownies in children's magazines in 1883. The first of the sixteen Brownie books was published in 1887.

12. Cummings, 113.

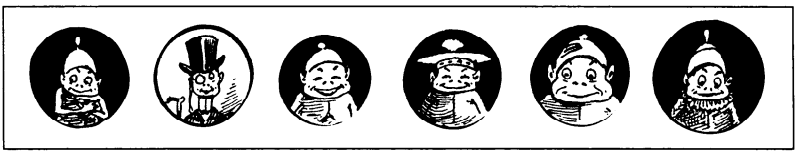

FIG. 1 Illustrations of Brownies. (From Palmer Cox, *Another Brownie Book* [New York, 1890], 110. Courtesy of the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.)

which included Dude, Rough Rider (modeled after Theodore Roosevelt), Chinaman, Irishman, Policeman, and Soldier.[13]

The combination of individualism, curiosity, industry, and harmonious social interaction suggests an Americanization of the Brownie. In the words of Cummings:

> Though the Brownies are apolitical and emerge nightly from a region which is never geographically defined, to anyone who reads even a few of the Brownie books it is obvious that the world of the Brownies not only is utopian, but embodies characteristics commonly associated with the American dream.[14]

As evidence of Cummings's assertion, the skeptic need only consult the third in the series of Brownie books, *The Brownies at Home* (1893), in which outings include a trip to the White House, an excursion to the Pennsylvania State House (Independence Hall), and a preview of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago that culminates in the patriotic scene of the Brownies hoisting a giant American flag as their contribution to the World's Fair.

Cox's Brownies, Americanized and utopian, also loved to explore the wide world, both geographical and technological. Books such as *The Brownies around the World* (1894), *The Brownies through the Union* (1895), and *The Brownies in the Philippines* (1904) demonstrate a penchant for travel. But of greater import for this study is the interest in technology they manifest in their many adventures. In *Another Brownie Book* (1890), delighted Brownies take themselves for a wild ride on a new steam locomotive, investigate the workings of a tugboat in a canal, and study entomological specimens projected through a stereopticon machine. In that same collection of adventures, the Brownies experiment with the telephone—a device that less than 10 percent of readers across America would then find in their own homes.[15] Cox's band of Brownies immediately adapts to life in the modern world:

13. See Lynda McCurdy, "Palmer Cox: Patriarch of Pint-Sized Pleasure," 1974, typescript, Strong Museum, 22–23.

14. Cummings (n. 9 above), 113–14.

15. See Claude S. Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 22.

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A telephone gave great delight
To those who tried it half the night,
Some asking after fresh supplies;
Or if their stocks were on the rise;
What ship was safe; what bank was firm;
Or who desired a second term.
Thus messages rant to and fro
With "Who are you?" "Hallo!" "Hallo!"
And all the repetitions known
To those who use the telephone.[16]

Twenty years later, in *The Brownies' Latest Adventures* (1910), they once again champion the now more common telephone by repairing broken lines and downed poles after a severe storm. Their work symbolizes a new role in linking domesticity to industry. Far from being the solitary nocturnal creatures of folklore, Cox's Brownies enjoy all the latest trappings of modernity and seem to prefer human technical achievement over their own magical powers. They effectively enchant the machines they use, thereby responding to the need for wonder in the modern age—a need articulated by André Kédros as "a modern marvel, capable of exorcising the menacing technological environment and showing the ways leading to the mastery no longer of nature, but of technology itself."[17] The Brownies help anchor the shock of new technologies to traditions of unseen forces and magical helpers.[18] Unlike their earlier folk counterparts, Cox's Brownies venture boldly beyond the home.

In reinventing the reclusive Brownies as advocates of technological progress and democratic values, Palmer Cox quickly realized their potential for commercial endorsements. After first appearing in the poem "The Brownies' Ride," in the February 1883 issue of *St. Nicholas* magazine, by November of that year they were advertising Ivory Soap on the cover of *Harper's Young People* magazine, a debut that marked not only their emergence as spokescreatures but the beginning of modern commercial charac-

16. Palmer Cox, *Another Brownie Book* (New York, 1890), 141.

17. André Kédros, "Le Merveilleux dans la littérature pour la jeunesse à l'ère technologique," *15th Congress of International Board on Books for Young People* (*IBBY*) 28 (1977): 23–31 (my translation). For a study of large-scale technological enchantment, see David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994). The effect generated by the spectacular projects examined in Nye's book differs from that produced by lesser technologies (such as the Brownie camera) that come to reside in the home. As Nye aptly demonstrates, the massive scale of the Hoover Dam, the Golden Gate Bridge, or the Statue of Liberty rivals natural wonders and creates awe through physical grandeur—an impossible feat for a small box camera. Instead, the Brownie's enchantment comes from its control over temporality, a theme I address below.

18. For a discussion of photography's relation to the supernatural, see Nancy Martha West, "Camera Fiends: Early Photography, Death, and the Supernatural," *Centennial Review* 40 (1996): 170–206.

ter licensing.[19] For his own profit, Cox consented to the use of his Brownies in advertisements for at least forty products.[20] Beyond that already large number of authorized endorsements, Brownie look-alikes proliferated in the mass media without Cox's copyright though with no negative legal repercussions, given that Cox could not lay claim to the folk Brownie but only to his own characters. Although the licensed and unlicensed use of the Brownies in advertising has not been tallied, the number would likely invite comparisons between Palmer Cox and Walt Disney.

By 1900, Cox had published seven Brownie books, and the Brownies had endorsed products for nearly seventeen years. Given that degree of media saturation, Eastman's (unauthorized) use of the Brownies to introduce the first one-dollar camera hardly suggests innovative marketing.[21] Nevertheless, Eastman exploited the characters to a degree unrivaled by his contemporaries; while Proctor and Gamble can claim the earliest commercial use of the Brownies, no company employed the sprites with as much impact and meaning as did Eastman Kodak. Unlike Ivory Soap and dozens of other Brownie-endorsed products, Eastman's "Brownie" camera adopted not only the Brownies' image, but also their name and characteristics. From his first use of the Brownie in 1900, Eastman increasingly took control of Palmer Cox's characters. The camera and the Brownie soon became so inextricably linked that Cox himself adopted photography as part of the Brownies' world.

The Kodak Brownie

The first announcement of the Brownie camera in a Kodak trade circular describes the newcomer as "a good, honest little camera that will delight the heart of any boy or girl."[22] Nothing in the appearance of the camera, which was made of jute board reinforced with wood and covered in imitation black leather, inspires awe or a sense of mystery. The Brownie's clothing, so to speak, is in the camera's cardboard packaging and printed advertisements, both of which make liberal use of Palmer Cox–style drawings. The socialization of the Brownie occurs with the help of a hard-hitting advertising campaign, for which the plan of attack is given to retailers in an article titled "Ammunition": "The campaign is about to open. The season

19. See Wayne Morgan, "Cox on the Box: Palmer Cox and the Brownies: The First Licensed Characters, the First Licensed Games," *Game Researchers' Notes* 2 (1996): 5533–37. Morgan focuses on the many Brownie games (both licensed and unlicensed), including blocks, puzzles, ninepins, marble games, toy artillery, rubber stamps, and ring toss.

20. Cummings (n. 9 above), 101.

21. Like the Eastman House librarians and curators, I have been unable to document the initial decision to use Cox's Brownie in Kodak advertising from Eastman's personal records and correspondence.

22. Kodak trade circular, no. 3 (February 1900), 1.

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FIG. 2 Advertisement for Brownie cameras. (From *The Youth's Companion*, 26 July 1900, 371.)

for aggressive work is at hand."[23] Long-range "magazine guns" will assault consumers with full-page ads, and catalogs will be used for "effective close-range work."[24] A separate article on the Brownie proposes that "[e]very school boy and girl in the land ought to have a Brownie before the vacation season begins."[25] Finally, in June, full-page Brownie advertisements appear in the most popular ten-cent magazines, including *St. Nicholas*, the first home of Palmer Cox's Brownies. A typical ad depicts tiny Brownies crawling on the camera, walking around the camera, and peering into the lens (fig. 2). The sprites help give life and movement to the otherwise dull black

23. Kodak trade circular, no. 5 (April 1900), 2.
24. Ibid., 3.
25. Ibid., 6.

FIG. 3 Brownie Number 1 camera and box, 1901. (Courtesy of the George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.)

box; they create a kinship, as if the device were a new inductee to the Brownie band.

The packaging of the camera, with its colorful images of a cheerful Brownie using a Brownie camera, envisions the snapshot photographer as a would-be folkloric character (fig. 3). As such, the Brownie-toting Brownie signals a move from verbal to visual preservation of memory. Inseparable from its technological double, the sprite personifies the transfer of oral tradition to what Scott McQuire, in his work on the social effects of the camera, calls the "memory machines" of industrial culture.[26] McQuire notes that although the traditions of oral culture did not die during the nineteenth century, social and cultural practices shifted the burden of memory to mechanized forms: "Increasingly, the story's function as a memory-text was transferred to the newspaper, the novel and the film."[27] Although a product of industry, the Brownie camera maintains an anachronistic allegiance to folk culture, as if the impetus to create the device had come from the Brownies themselves. But as a "memory machine," the Brownie was allied much more with oral history than with the printed word. The new Brownie figure asserts an equivalence between snapshot culture and preindustrial traditions of storytelling.

To cultivate the camera's identity, Kodak began shipping "Brownie Books" as early as 1901. The Kodak trade circular called the books "the best Brownie advertisement that has yet been put out."[28] The first booklet contained winning pictures from a nationwide photo competition. The second,

26. Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time, and Space in the Age of the Camera* (London, 1998), 121.

27. Ibid., 120.

28. Kodak trade circular (February 1901), 3.

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with the slightly altered title "The Book of the Brownies," begins with "The Brownie's Story of the Brownie." The tale places the camera's origins in the world of the Brownies and reads:

> Once upon a time the Queen of the Fairies summoned the Chief of all the Brownies to her presence. "Good Brownie," said she, "for many years you have served me faithfully and well, and I now grant you one request—your heart's desire." Bowing low the Brownie pondered but a moment and then replied: "Give to me that which will bring back pleasures past and double pleasures present—that I may bestow it upon my earthly friends, the children." Waving once her magic wand, the Fairy Queen placed in the waiting Brownie's hands a box.
>
> "Speed you back to earth again, and in a city near the great inland seas, you will find a man having power over light and darkness. Give to him this box, that he may reproduce it for the benefit of your children friends—all you ask for, and more, the box contains."
>
> With box secure in his tiny arms the Brownie vanished and by means known to Brownies soon placed the box in the hands of the man by the inland seas.
>
> As all good children know, mortals must heed the behest of the Fairy Queen, and so the magical box was reproduced again and again and scattered over the wide world wherever Brownie bands were found, to whisper in waiting ears the secret of the pleasures in the little black box.
>
> This is the Brownie's Story of the Brownie—the little camera that has afforded pleasure and education to thousands of children and grown-ups the world over.[29]

Rather than masking the corporate side of production, the tale establishes a magical provenance for the camera, helping to link Eastman Kodak to a fairytale world. The tale transforms Eastman ("the man by the inland seas") into a demiurgic master of light and darkness, a man with power to reproduce the "magical box" for all the children of the world. The camera's origin is shown to be the result of a special collaboration: engineering courtesy of the Fairy Queen, and mass reproduction courtesy of George Eastman. Thanks to that collaboration, the mechanisms of mass fabrication and distribution gain an aura of enchantment. At "the behest of the Fairy Queen," Eastman's business is the proliferation of otherworldly technology.

Among the attributes of the Brownie camera, the one most central to "The Brownie's Story of the Brownie" is its power over time. Thanks to the Brownie's thoughtful wish, human beings receive a means of controlling the past and adding joy to the present. The temporality of the Brownie camera is that of the fairies—an eternal present. As poet and cultural critic

29. Eastman Kodak Company, "The Book of the Brownies" (1902), 1–2.

Susan Stewart remarks in her well-known study, *On Longing*, "[w]hile the gigantic takes up time and space in history, the fairy lives in a continual present. Fairy rulers are often described as simultaneously ancient and ageless."[30] Similarly, the Brownie camera renders its object as both eternally present and suddenly ancient, generating nostalgia for the present. Photographs become what Nancy Martha West calls "*instant antiques*, objects that condense to nothingness the increasingly small amount of time required to make something old into something cherished."[31] The "instant antique" phenomenon fulfills the Brownie's proposed doubling of "pleasures present," as it transforms everyday experiences into valuable relics. Through photography, the past reenters the present, and the present becomes a treasured past—human time commingles with that of the fairies.

Corollary to the commingling of human and fairy time is the introduction of modern society's amnesia into the realm of fantasy (read also, *childhood*). Palmer Cox's imitative response to Eastman's campaign exemplifies the problem. Not long after the appearance of Eastman Kodak's Brownie, Cox added his own Brownie with a box camera to the Brownie band. In books appearing prior to the popularization of the dollar camera, the Brownies travel the world without ever taking a photo. Suddenly, in *The Brownies in the Philippines* (1904), nearly every page includes a snap-happy Brownie (fig. 4). The appearance of this new figure in Cox's work both indicates and spreads a growing anxiety about the undocumented life. Sprites once content with a quiet and invisible domesticity learn to seek photographic proof of their expeditions. Similarly, potential consumers, especially women and children, learn that their own previously invisible lives need mediatized expression. Eastman's "intended consumers were not professional photographers," remarks Marianne Hirsch, "but people who had seen photographs but had not thought of actually taking them any more than they might have considered painting pictures, writing novels, or composing music."[32] Hirsch's comparison reminds us that cultural practices and attitudes could have led many people to self-exclude from photographic expression—no matter how affordable—were it not for Eastman's aggressive Brownie campaign.

Snapshot Print Culture

As a technology that democratizes the author's voice, photography promises to transcend the achievements of print culture. In both subtle and direct ways, Eastman makes snapshot photography a higher form of self-

30. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore, 1984), 113.

31. West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (n. 3 above), 16 (emphasis in original).

32. M. Hirsch (n. 6 above), 6.

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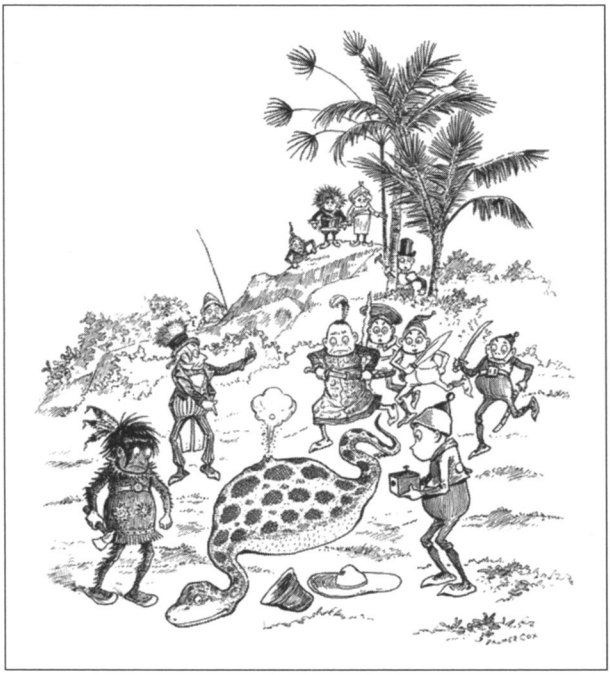

FIG. 4 Brownie with camera. (From Palmer Cox, *The Brownies in the Philippines* [New York, 1904], 13.)

expression than the written word. In the images of a girl photographing a Brownie (fig. 5), for example, the use of books as a prop for the camera serves a dual purpose: the first, merely functional; the second, symbolic. The box sits on a pedestal of books ostensibly to reach a height suitable for taking the Brownie's portrait, yet the resulting image also confirms symbolically the cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words. The camera's placement asserts the Brownie's authority and status as equal, if not superior, to books. This reordering of hierarchies is echoed by Eastman in a humorous letter to a friend. Adopting a prophetic tone, Eastman foretells the day when Kodak representatives

> will carry the good word into the utmost regions of the earth; yea, into even the Sunday Schools and Kindergartens, until it shall finally come to pass that children will be taught to develop before they learn to walk, and grown-up people—instead of trying word painting—will merely hand out a photograph and language will become obsolete.[33]

33. Collins (n. 3 above), 99.

FIG. 5 Girl with Brownie camera and Brownie figure. (From Eastman Kodak Company, Kodak trade circular [April 1902], 2. Courtesy of the George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.)

While exaggerated in the letter for the sake of a laugh, Eastman's utopian replacement of written narrative (or "word painting") with photographs appears in only slightly more subtle forms in his official publications.

An article in a 1900 circular gives photography a context within the history of communication that reduces the printing press to yet another step toward photographic expression: "Away back yonder, in the dawn of civilization, our ancestors had no way of recording thoughts and events, but after a time a system of writing was formulated . . ." begins the story.[34] Next, the sweeping narrative advances to the advent of the printing press before continuing in a manner that places photography on a higher point of the evolutionary scale: "Now photography is a means of recording thoughts, actions and events, as well as an art."[35] This new timeline of progress alters the relationship between picture and printed word from the more standard account that would make the printing press the fulfillment of cave painting. In Kodak's history, photography—and not writing—becomes the ultimate end of our primitive instincts. As an article in a 1915 Kodak trade circular stated, "[t]he *impulse* to Kodak goes back to the stone age [*sic*]—the *means*

34. Kodak trade circular (n. 23 above), 6.
35. Ibid.

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is less than thirty years old."[36] Kodak makes the production of images a purer form of narrative, akin to the spoken tales and records of lost cultures. The act of picture-making offers both a connection to primeval desires and a return to childhood innocence. In that regard, the nostalgia of photography stems not only from the preservation of childhood and the antiquing of the quotidian, but from ties to prehistory—primitivism through technology.

Eastman's narrative simultaneously validates photography as an evolved art form and a rediscovery of primitive desires. In an era of flux and transformation, Eastman grafts ancient roots onto the turn-of-the-century family. The perceived continuity between ancient desire and modern technology counteracts the destabilizing force of innovation and invites potential consumers to discover their inherent longing to photograph. Rather than a hobby handed down to the masses by the leisure class, photography becomes a universal language, one that recalls the cave paintings of Lascaux more than the oil paintings of the Louvre. In a testament to the appeal of Stone Age imagery, Edward Steichen described "The Family of Man," his 1955 blockbuster exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, in terms similar to those employed in the Kodak trade circular forty years before: "Long before the birth of a word language the caveman communicated by visual images. The invention of photography gave visual communication its most simple, direct, universal language"[37]

In Steichen's declaration as in Eastman's, the representation of photography as a universal language trumps (but does not exclude) artistic expression. Steichen's exhibition, which toured the world for eight years and featured more than five hundred photographs of families around the world grouped by such universal themes as children and love, also promoted photography as a tool for neutralizing cultural differences. In that, we witness the link between the caveman (universal symbol of shared primitive roots) and the Brownies (spokescreatures for democracy and globalized fraternity through technological consumption and self-representation). Steichen's "The Family of Man" is commonly interpreted as a postwar search for commonalities among disparate cultures, but the Brownie's impact on the formative years of snapshot photography suggests a public already conditioned to equate photography with bands of united folk from all walks of life (modern and primitive).[38] The Brownie boys and girls of the 1900s had

36. Kodak trade circular, vol. 16, no. 12 (November 1915), 14. Kodak ads were still using the same language as late as 1989: "150 years ago a language was invented that everyone understood," quoted in M. Hirsch, 48.

37. Quoted in M. Hirsch (n. 6 above), 49. For a discussion of both photography and motion pictures as hieroglyphics, see Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford, 2005), 35–60.

38. The Museum of Modern Art's own web site calls the exhibition "an expression of humanism in the decade following World War II": http://www.moma.org/research/archives/highlights/06_1955.html (accessed 5 July 2005).

become the adult public willing to embrace photographs as the medium best-suited to express that message.

Of all the products to use Brownies in advertising, only the Brownie camera conflated Brownie, product, and consumer. Eastman not only essentially added a new member to the Brownie band with his snapshot photographer, he added hundreds of thousands of boys and girls to the throng. Just as the public was meant to identify the camera with the character in a happy confluence of values, powers, and traits, so also was the user of the camera meant to become a Brownie boy or girl. With that goal in mind, Eastman Kodak created the "Brownie Camera Club of America," complete with its own constitution. The essential prerequisites for membership, as stated in Article III of the club's constitution, were that the child be a resident of the United States or Canada under 16 years of age, and that he or she own a Brownie camera. The lineage of the humble club can be traced to the many serious amateur photographic societies that flourished in the 1880s and 1890s—societies often modeled on the European tradition of art academies.[39] As a "Brownie" club, however, the organization also identified with the mystique of preliterate oral traditions and nomadic bands of sprites. The charter member of the club, a 13-year-old boy, joined on 22 April 1900.[40] Like many who would follow, the boy gained a new identity, one with ties to both industry and folk culture. The Brownie Camera Club made children members of the Brownies through ownership of what was fundamentally marketed as a corporate product born of folk technology. Club literature, photo competitions and exhibitions, and advertisements in children's magazines helped create a sense of community among America's first generation of snapshot photographers. While all clearly in the interest of the company's profits, photos published by Eastman Kodak of or by real-life Brownie boys and girls are nonetheless important for their role in helping children express themselves as members of a community.

Advertisements urged, "Let the kiddies tell *their* story with a BROWNIE," and "Even in their kindergarten days, the youngsters can make good pictures with a BROWNIE."[41] The texts convey a pleading tone, as if exclusion from the fellowship of the Brownies constitutes a deprivation of basic childhood rights. Another slogan, used for years, rings like an emancipatory rallying cry, beseeching adults everywhere to "Let the Children Kodak!" At a time when children were to be seen and not heard, the Brownie introduced them to a potent, if mute, form of self-expression. In a parallel campaign, women were encouraged to tell their stories from their own

39. See Sternberger (n. 4 above) for a discussion of late-nineteenth-century photographic societies and clubs.

40. Kodak trade circular, no. 6 (May 1900), 4.

41. Kodak trade circular (n. 36 above), 5 (emphasis in original); Kodak trade circular, vol. 20, no. 7 (June 1916), 5.

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point of view with a Kodak. In both campaigns, groups typically excluded from the production of ideology—women and children—are given an alternate form of expression in which to order and express their own worldview. Although lacking in traditional power, users ostensibly gain visual control over their surroundings and are able to make their outlook concrete and valuable through photographs. According to Jack Zipes, the content of their photos, while influenced to some degree by advertisements, does not emanate solely from a corporation disguised as its audience, as is the case in radio, television, and motion pictures.[42] This is not to say that corporate interests do not invade the life of the camera's user (which, Eastman hopes, will be revisited as a series of "Kodak moments"), but certain narrative decisions rest in the hands that press the buttons. In other words, the Brownie enthusiast is promised authorial status, however mediated the production of his or her story.

"We have yet to explore sufficiently the ways in which the technologies of the mass media were able to foster and not just weaken or destroy a sense of community," writes Lawrence Levine.[43] In the case of the Brownie, as in any study of mass-marketed technology, the reading that underscores the insidious forces of corporate culture comes easily. Either because we have grown accustomed to hearing about it, or because it is always there, the destructive side of technological innovation attracts attention. But in each case, as Zipes observes, both positive and negative purposes accompany the advancement of mass media.[44] On the negative side, the Brownie club aims to create a nation of prepubescent consumers—junkies hooked on a brand before they learn to tie their shoes. "Plant the Brownie acorn and the Kodak oak will grow," boasts the Kodak trade circular.[45] Further, one can argue that the Brownie's most sinister accomplishment is to commodify childhood. By creating and feeding a perception that an always-receding childhood can be preserved only through film, does Kodak double pleasure or anxiety? Pause and draw a line connecting the promotion of snapshot photography to this familiar scene: parents at a school pageant, nearly all viewing the spectacle through the lens of a camcorder or camera, sacrificing their firsthand enjoyment for the sake of the archive. Is this the enchanted legacy of the Brownie? Add pornography and invasion of privacy to its offenses, and the black box now seems more like Pandora's than the

42. Zipes (n. 8 above), 20–21. He adds (p. 20) that "It was the radio, then movies, and ultimately TV which were able to draw together large groups of people as the original folk-tale narrators did and to relate tales as though they were derived from the point of view of the people themselves" and pronounces the result of mass-mediated fairy tales "a happy reaffirmation of the system which produces them" (p. 21).

43. Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1393.

44. Zipes, 19.

45. Kodak trade circular (n. 40 above), 1.

gift of a Fairy Queen. Nevertheless, to vilify Eastman Kodak as a "soulless corporation"[46] oversimplifies the problem, as does the glorification of Eastman as a great emancipator of oppressed women and children. The complex nature of Eastman's project is perhaps best manifested in Kodak's fairy tale of the Brownie. Like the "You press the button, we do the rest" campaign that preceded it, the Brownie tale teaches that photographic self-expression, however magical, must pass through the industrial complexes headed by a technologically skilled "man by the inland seas."[47] Consumer-based narrative decisions notwithstanding, the owner of a Brownie mimics the collaborative process seen in "The Brownie's Story of the Brownie."

As advertisements began to label children as "Brownie" boys and girls, the Brownie characters appeared less frequently. In the images of children photographing Brownies, the camera is used as a transition between the child and the folkloric figure, suggesting an affinity between childhood and enchantment, both of which are made accessible to adults through the camera. A 1909 circular identifies the product line and a lineup of children as "The Brownie Family" (fig. 6).[48] Another popular series of advertisements that began as early as 1903 uses images of a (human) "Brownie boy" carrying a fishing pole and a camera.[49] The Palmer Cox Brownies were sufficiently well-known that the reference to Brownies was clear, with or without images of the creatures. The characterization of children as Brownies reveals the camera's power to seize the ephemeral, fleeting nature of childhood in action—a feat no less marvelous to the adult consumer than the idea of capturing an invisible sprite on film.

Conclusion

In May 1914, Eastman Kodak announced the discontinuation of the "Brownie Book."[50] Brownie advertising did not stop, but the cameras were marketed more directly to adults. A 1909 circular acknowledged that it took some time for the Eastman Kodak Company to realize "that grown-up people were making pictures with the No. 1 Brownie."[51] In response to that realization, the advertising began to change. The expanded line of Brownie cameras enjoyed more direct association with the parent brand in trade literature that began to refer to them as "Little Cousins of the Kodaks."[52] The consolidation of catalogs into one "Kodak Summer Book" in 1914 led to

46. John Bull Jr., quoted in Sternberger (n. 4 above), 116.
47. Eastman Kodak Company, "The Book of the Brownies" (n. 29 above), 1.
48. Kodak trade circular (1909), 7.
49. An example can be seen in the June 1903 Kodak trade circular.
50. Kodak trade circular (1914), 3.
51. Kodak trade circular (1909), 1.
52. Ibid.

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KODAK TRADE CIRCULAR. 7

THE BROWNIE FAMILY.

Baby is the subject, and finds the posing fun.
Harry is the expert with Brownie No. 1.
Susie is the artist of Brownie No. 2;
She says "there's really nothing, the little box can't do"!
Jane is at the shutter of Brownie No. 3;
Johnnie chose a Folding one, as all of you may see.
Mary likes her pictures in the "postal" size,
Thomas loves the "stereo"—note its eager eyes.
With our "Special Artists" always on the spot,
We're sure of knowing who is who, as well as what is what.
The prints we put in albums, each one neatly dated—
The Brownie Family History is "fully illustrated."

—*Tudor Jenks.*

Some advertisers like rhymes. If you do, here's a good one. The cut is No. 290, and is yours for the asking.

FIG. 6 Advertisement and poem, "The Brownie Family." (From Eastman Kodak Company, Kodak trade circular [1909]. Courtesy of the George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.)

the adoption of a tone aimed at adult consumers. During World War I, the Brownie was sometimes cast in the role of Nanny ("*You* don't have to provide amusement for the children—Just leave it to the BROWNIE"), but the idea of capturing childhood ("Pictures of the children by the children have the charm of childhood itself") remained central to most campaigns.[53]

More than a century after the introduction of the Brownie, the magical tale of its origins has nearly disappeared. The story of a Brownie's goodwill toward children, of a Fairy Queen's engineering, and of Eastman's magical mass production no longer inform the concept of photography in the minds of adults or children. The idea of "Brownie boys and girls" now evokes cookie sales rather than snapshots and camera clubs.[54] The sprites have returned to invisibility, replaced by efficient Kodak technicians. Versions of "Brownie" cameras continued to be manufactured into the 1950s, but as Palmer Cox's Brownies lost their popularity and faded from public memory, so too did the association of the camera with its namesake. Nevertheless, the Brownie ghost in the machine merits attention for its impact on a foundational period in the conception of snapshot photography. By the time the folkloric Brownies had faded from memory, millions of consumers had learned to identify themselves and photography with the traits of the Brownie band. By popularizing snapshot photography as a valuable language in its own right, as a voice of the people in an increasingly mediatized society, Eastman broke the oral/print binary. The snapshot possesses not only the immediacy, transparency, and purity of enunciation associated with oral expression, but also the tangible and archival qualities of the printed document—an enchanted middle ground where the primitive and the modern coexist.

53. Kodak trade circular (April 1915), 16 (emphasis in original); Kodak trade circular (June 1916), 5.

54. Beginning Girl Guides (Girl Scouts in the United States) were called "Brownies" until 1985, when Daisy Scouts became the beginner scouting organization for kindergarten girls. The organization was founded in 1909 in England, and in 1912 in the United States. References to the world of fairies abound in the early Brownie organization, including elf and gnome emblems, membership pins representing a sprite figure, and "pixie" caps. A sampling of uniforms is available online at http://www.vintagegirlscout.com/unibr.htm (accessed 10 November 2005).